

Much of this drill and technique work originated from lectures and articles by Buck Nystrom and has been adapted to fit our players and program each year. The great coaches I have learned from all had a common belief in the emphasis on being a teacher of technique. The area of technique is the one common denominator for all the kids on your team, regardless of skill level. Kids can see and feel

themselves improving week to week throughout the season. This keeps the kids believing and motivated in practice. At times the improvement is monumental, but most often, it is in small steps. It is these small steps that we coaches need to continually recognize and reinforce to keep the kids believing in themselves.

Power Training for Football

By: Bill Ihrke, Plainview / Elgin-Millville High School

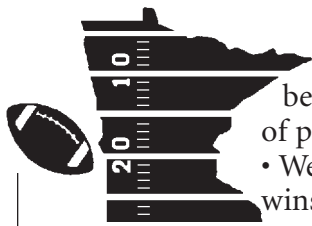


P/EM *Bulldog* staff (left to right): Kevin Lamb, Bryan Brighton, Craig Ihrke, Ron Randall, Ben Peter, Bill Schultz and Bill Ihrke.

In 1999, our football team was 8-3 and finished as the Section 1AAA Runner-up. We completed a good season, we were in every game we played, but could not seem to turn the corner against the perennial powers of southeast Minnesota. As a coaching staff we took a long, hard look at what we were doing with our athletes. I felt our players were well-coached and prepared fundamentally,

but we were not winning some key individual match-ups physically and that was preventing us from advancing.

I came to the realization that in our league (Three Rivers Conference) we are not going to “out coach” many teams. . . everyone is well coached, they know sound fundamentals, and are prepared. If we are going to give our kids a leg up, we must



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beat our opponents in the area of physical training.

- We must become the team that wins the key individual matchups that throughout a game

will make the difference. To do that we had to change the way we trained. . . we had to go to “Power Training”.

We contacted Scott Safe (SAFE USA) in Cannon Falls, and asked if he would put on a power clinic for our athletes (all sports) and coaches. He came into our school and did a fantastic job teaching not only the proper techniques of Olympic style lifting (particularly squats and cleans), but also the important “why’s” of Olympic style lifting for athletic benefit. Olympic style lifting is strength + speed. We had lifted, but not really with purpose. Our thoughts were further focused after attending the Nebraska football clinic later that spring and learning they lifted for Power, specifically to train for speed. In fact, Nebraska had eliminated the bench press from their core lifts - everything was “ground based”. Ground based training became the direction we went, and that has made all of the difference in the world.

After the SAFE USA clinic, our top vertical jump was 24 inches. Just two and a half years later testing only our football team in August, we had 40 players record a vertical jump of 24 inches, and we had 27 players jump 30 inches or higher! That is a significant improvement. Our ground based training has made a significant difference in the speed and strength of all of our athletic teams. Since we have gone to this type of training, we have won two boys state track titles and a state football title. Our athlete’s confidence has risen tremendously.

Bryan Brighton is one of our varsity football coaches, and he also is the strength coach for our district. He has done an outstanding job of converting all of our athletic teams to be “ground based”. We essentially have the entire athletic department doing the same core lifts with slight variations per sport to be sport specific. The following are points of emphasis that Bryan feels are essential in ground based strength training:

- Sport specific movements - replicate what we want to see on the field.
- Multi-Joint Movements - feet on the ground - you don’t do anything good in sports on

your back

- Speed is KING.
- Vertical Jump is the ultimate measuring stick - the power clean is a close 2nd.
- Hang Cleans vs. Power Cleans - It takes .4 seconds to execute a hang clean, and it takes .4 seconds to execute a block or tackle in football. We do power cleans because we want to replicate the low starting point of the 3 point stance. - Yes the Power Clean is 2 separate pulls, but we feel the replication of the starting position is necessary for what we do. - Our football players do Power Cleans regardless of position for team consistency.

- Other sports have different needs with different philosophies, so some of our sports do Hang Cleans (i.e. wrestling and basketball have a standing stance, so they do Hang Cleans).

Our power program is based on the USA Weightlifting’s Rest/Pause Principle. During the season we do 2-3 sets of 2-5 reps of Power Cleans, Squats, and Hammer Jammer. We believe very strongly in using the Hammer Strength Hammer Jammer rather than the bench press. In our workouts, we do a couple sets of close-grip bench to work on the “punch” needed for separation in football contact.

A key element in our strength training was that we quit lifting “after practice”, and trained in the weight room during practice. At P/E-M we are paired with Elgin-Millville in both football and soccer, so we have shuttle buses going back and forth between the two towns. We have a very finite time for practice, yet we are committed to one half hour in the weight room a day (two days per week per level). This leaves us with only about 1 1/2 hours of football practice time per day, but we have decided we are not skipping physical training! Weight training IS part of our practice - and we lift until the season is over.

In terms of “Power Training” on the football field, we have eliminated most of our aerobic conditioning exercises and have really emphasized explosive speed drills and sprints. Even in August when we do circuit training for conditioning, all stations are anaerobic activities with more rest than exercise. I used to think as the head coach it was my responsibility to have the team in shape so I ran my teams to death. I slept well at night, but I did not realize our teams did not have their legs



back on Friday night.

What we typically do now is dozens of various sprint drills, with a great deal of rest in between. We sometimes train with grades 9-12, sometimes 10-12 - to allow for rest. I split into groups into Sr. backs, Sr. line, Jr. backs, Jr. line, etc. - we do this even when running short sprints. We want those kids to go 100% on the first training run, 100% on the last, and on every one in between. They will do that if they know they will get enough recovery. If you are not allowing enough recovery, the kids will get sore (and pace themselves), if you have little soreness your recovery is probably about right.

This may sound crazy, but going into our first game of 2002 we had not run any distances greater than 40 yards, and most sprints had rests of 25 - 40 seconds between reps (about the same time as a football huddle lasts). Our kids really never got sore during two-a-day practices, and my biggest fear was that we were not in shape. After our first game (vs. 2002 AA State Champion King-land) our kids said that was the best shape they

had ever been in. To make a long story short, in 14 games not one team outscored us in the 4th quarter, and we came from behind 3 times to beat some excellent teams in the play-offs. We had accomplished a training method to put kids in a position to win some individual battles.

We took a real look at what we were doing to train our kids into real athletes. I know we have a lot yet to learn, but I also know we are starting to do a lot of things that are going in the right direction. The quality of Minnesota football is improving; as a state we indeed are putting out better athletes. As a coaching fraternity we need to look at what we can do to give our kids the physical training that makes all the X's and O's work on the football field. All kids can improve their explosive power- it is just a matter of what are we as coaches doing to put our kids in a position to accomplish the kinds of growth that they are shooting for.

The Rushford-Peterson Punt Return

By: James Reinhardt, Rushford-Peterson High School

I have coached at Rushford and Rushford-Peterson High School for thirty years first as a volunteer seventh grade coach, then as a B-team coach, varsity line coach and finally as the head coach in 1985.

During that time I have had the good fortune to work with a very loyal and competent staff and some fine athletes. Glen Bernard coaches the backs, secondary and B-team and has been in the program since 1975. Duane Koenen coaches our linebackers, receivers, special teams and B-team. Mitch Thompson coaches the offensive and defensive line with help from his son Davin, one of our former players. Mitch and Duane have each been with the program for over ten years.

Our C-team is coached by Gary Wade our track coach and Rod Anderson a former player and our

softball coach. All the coaches with the exception of Davin are full time teachers in the Rushford-Peterson school system.

This year we were fortunate to have a group of good athletes that loved the game of football. We didn't have great size, but we were aggressive and we had better than average team speed. We were an explosive offensive team and could score at any time, but we lacked offensive consistency. We were not the type of team that could sustain a long drive and were as likely to run three plays and punt as we were to get a first down or a score.

As a result field position was very important to us, as it is to most teams. We made our living playing sound defense and returning punts allowing us to spend most of the game on a short field.

A few years ago we made some changes in our